

This Week in Congress

May 19, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Kansas Farmers and Taxpayers Deserve a Better Farm Bill

After months of delay, Congress passed the 2008 Farm Bill this week. Despite my work to get a farm bill that is good for Kansas agriculture and my efforts to improve this bill, I opposed passage of the 2008 Farm Bill for its failure to adequately address the needs of Kansas farmers and taxpayers.

I had two basic guidelines in deciding how to vote. First, the new farm bill should be at least as good as the current farm bill. This is clearly not the case. Second, Kansas farmers repeatedly told me to protect direct payments and maintain strong support for crop insurance. The 2008 Farm Bill failed on both accounts.

With skyrocketing fuel and fertilizer costs, now is not the time to reduce direct payments. Under this bill, it is projected that farmers will not receive any countercyclical or loan deficiency payments. Therefore, the direct payment is the only part of the safety net that will be available to help farmers meet the challenges of dramatically rising input costs. Instead of investing in trade compliant programs such as direct payments, programs that are market and trade distorting received increased funding.

As a member of the committee charged with working out the differences between the House and Senate versions of the farm bill, I offered an amendment that would have restored the cuts made to direct payments. I also supported an amendment that would have restored cuts to crop insurance. Unfortunately, both of these amendments failed on party-line votes. Cuts to these programs had less to do with real reform and more to do with using them as a bank to fund other items.

With the limited amount of funding available, Congress owed it to farmers and taxpayers to use those funds in the most responsible way possible. There are provisions in this bill that spend money on things such as salmon recovery in California and land purchases from a large timber company in Montana. The money spent on these items alone could have prevented the cut to direct payments. I cannot put my stamp of approval on a bill I know fails to meet the needs of Kansas farmers and poorly spends taxpayer dollars.

Although I oppose the direction this farm bill takes American agriculture, the measure passed the House and Senate with enough votes to override an expected veto by President Bush. It appears that this legislation will be the farm bill for the next five years. I pledge to continue doing all I can to support agriculture in Kansas. [Click here](#) to view my comments on the floor of the House of Representatives about the 2008 Farm Bill.

[Click here](#)

to share your comments with me on the farm bill.

Honoring Fallen Law Enforcement Officers

Law enforcement officers are some of the true heroes in our communities. Every year, brave men and women give up their life in service to and protection of the places we call home. This week, I joined law enforcement officers and family members from across the country at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund's 20th annual Candlelight Vigil. The names of 358 fallen law enforcement officers were read during the ceremony, including Kansans Robert Tim Buckman and William Jones.

Tim Buckman's actions on the night of May 4, 2007, exemplify the unselfishness and dedication to service that law enforcement officers exhibit each day. Tim, who was an officer for the Stafford County Sheriff's Office and the City of Macksville, lost his life from injuries he received while warning residents to take shelter from the devastating tornado that destroyed Greensburg and damaged other communities. Plaques were placed on the memorial honoring

Tim and William, who was a member of the Cherryvale Police Department and lost his life in 1903.

Many Kansas Law Enforcement Officers and their families were in Washington, D.C., this week for National Police Week and to participate in the Candlelight Vigil. Several came by my office for a tour of the U.S. Capitol building including Shawn and Amanda Moreland of Salina, Jeffery and Marla Patrick of Lindsborg, Terry and Mary Stithem of WaKeeney, Jeffery and Mary Dietz of Derby, Wanda Thornton of Wellington, Vicki Akers of Douglas, John and Judy Bertram of Haviland, Eric Haskin of Greensburg, Melody Siroky of Pratt, Douglas and Monnie Shearer of Hays, Clayton and Beverly Jamison of Andover, and Lee and Betty Jantz of Cimarron. I appreciate the work these officers do on a daily basis to keep our communities safe.

Reviewing Commodity Markets

As the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, I participated in a hearing on Thursday about recent price swings in the agriculture and energy commodity markets. The committee heard testimony from 12 witnesses in an effort to learn about the source of dramatic movements in the commodity markets. Over the last year, agricultural commodity markets have seen prices increase. While this is good news to many farmers, it also presents new challenges. The role of the Committee is to make sure the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) is doing its job to keep markets functioning smoothly and that pricing is done efficiently and with transparency.

Participating in a Hearing on Delta and Northwest Airline Merger

On April 15, Delta and Northwest Airlines announced a proposed merger. The announcement increased speculation that other airline carriers within the industry could merge, further reducing the number of airline choices available to Kansans. On Wednesday, I attended a Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation hearing on the Delta and Northwest merger. The CEOs of each airline testified and said the merger was needed because of the high cost of fuel and improved international routes. I will continue to monitor the situation and look closely at the merger proposal.

New Veterans Community Based Outpatient Clinic Opens in Hutchinson

On Friday, I joined Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts, former Senator Bob Dole, Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Peake, VISN 15 Director Peter Almenoff and Dole VA Medical Director Tom Sanders to formally open the Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Hutchinson. At a veterans forum I hosted in Hutchinson in 2004, area veterans voiced their concerns about access to health care services in south-central Kansas. In May 2007, I announced the VA had approved funding for the Hutchinson CBOC. Today, the Hutchinson CBOC is the fifth clinic I have helped open since coming to Congress. The other clinics I have helped bring to Kansas are located in Hays, Dodge City, Salina and Junction City.

The Dole VA Medical Center estimates the Hutchinson clinic will serve around 2300 existing

patients and 200 new patients. It will provide routine health care, laboratory work, radiological views and prescription and mental health services to area veterans. Access to health care is one of the most important issues our veteran population faces in Kansas. I appreciate the VA's support of the Community Based Outpatient Clinic program. [Click here](#) to view photos from the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Celebrating 75 Years of Service to Veterans

Before attending the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Hutchinson on Friday, I participated in a celebration marking the 75th anniversary of the Robert J. Dole Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Regional Office in Wichita. The Dole VA plays an important role in the lives of our military men and women returning from service overseas, as well as the lives of soldiers who served years ago. We owe our veterans the best treatment we can provide in thanks for what they have done for us. I was honored to join Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Peake, Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts and Congressman Todd Tiahrt at this event. [Click here](#) to view photos from the celebration.

Visiting Lincoln Elementary School in Hutchinson

While in Hutchinson on Friday, I visited Lincoln Elementary School. Thank you to Principal Dr. Marilyn Graham and third grade teacher Glinda Theus for the opportunity to speak with their students. I talked to the children about what they wanted to be when they grew up and about

what I do as a congressman. It was also nice to meet Vera Goss, who volunteers in the classroom as a foster grandparent. Darrell Pope, president of the Hutchinson NAACP chapter, was kind enough to join me at the school. I appreciate his hospitality. I enjoy visiting classrooms because it allows me the chance to see firsthand both the challenges and the good things happening in schools across Kansas. [Click here](#) to view photos from my visit.

Receiving Award at Kansas Municipal Utilities Annual Meeting

It was a privilege to speak to and receive an award from the Kansas Municipal Utilities at their annual meeting this week. Municipal utilities are vital to towns across Kansas. Communities from Cawker City to Kansas City enjoy the benefits of having a locally owned and service-oriented utility provider. I commend the members who gathered this week to learn how to better provide electricity, public water, gas and wastewater systems in the towns and cities where they live. I also thank them for honoring me with the Fred D. Diehl Award, which recognizes individuals for their contributions to the municipal utility community in Kansas.

Speaking at Plainville High School Graduation

On Saturday, I delivered the commencement address to the 2008 graduating class of Plainville High School in Plainville. I appreciated the opportunity to join Superintendent Beth Ruest, teachers, friends and family members in my hometown and speak at the school I once attended. I was honored to share this important milestone with the 33 graduating seniors,

including valedictorians Aaron Becker and Aubrey Frederking and salutatorians Deidre Jones and Bretta Mick. I wish the students all the best and hope they continue to pursue educational opportunities throughout their life. [Click here](#) to read my speech to the graduates.

Remembering the Life of State Representative Ted Powers of Mulvane

I was saddened to learn that State Representative Ted Powers passed away this week. Ted served in the Kansas Legislature for 16 years. I had the pleasure to serve with him for five of those years. My thoughts and prayers are with his wife Betty Mae and the rest of the Powers family.

In the Office

Terry Holdren of Topeka was in with Kansas Farm Bureau to discuss the farm bill. Greg Nelson of Manhattan was in with the United Egg Producers to talk about issues facing the poultry industry in Kansas. Jeff Stasch of Garden City and Brick Scheer of Wichita were in with the Kansas Dental Association to tell me about the cost and prevalence of Meth Mouth and the need to educate young people about the effects of methamphetamine on their oral health.

Dr. James Gardner of Manhattan, Dr. Donald Hatton of Lawrence, Dr. William Sullivan of Pittsburg, Dr. Leighton Sweet of Shawnee Mission and Dr. Garold Minns of Wichita were in with the American College of Physicians to discuss Medicare reimbursement rates and the potential shortage in primary care doctors. Denny Senseney of Wichita was in with the International Music Products Association to emphasize the importance of music and arts in public schools. Rosanne Siemens of Topeka, Lori Goetsch of Manhattan and Denise Smith of Johnson were in with the Kansas Library Association to express their support for E-rates, which help libraries and schools stay technologically competitive.

Members of the Kansas Association of Realtors were in to update me on the housing market in Kansas and to discuss housing stimulus legislation. In with the group were Delores Dalke of Hillsboro; Cindy Green and Lynne Wherley of Leawood; Carol Mangan of Coffeyville; Lee McClelland, Kathy Woodward, Rob Curtis and Chris Cowins of Overland Park; Jim Sheen, Connie Goodnow, Christy Stinger, Dakota Ewert, Janet Carter, Jeanette Johnson and John Green of Topeka; Tom Brungardt of Milford; Ann Christian of Manhattan; Perry Crume and Jeff Carson of Shawnee; Luke Bell and Mike McGrew of Lawrence; and Susan Younger of Olathe.

Joe and John Bogner of Dodge City, Bill Goodlatte of Wichita and Steve Beykirch of Frontenac were in with the Kansas Beer Wholesalers Association to explain the benefits of a three-tier system for alcohol distribution and how the industry is promoting responsible behavior and alcohol safety. Jim Schuster, Chairman and CEO of Hawker Beechcraft, and Chuck Perkins of Wichita and Gary Kelley of Olathe were in with the General Aviation Manufacturers Association to talk about air traffic modernization legislation and the current state of general aviation in Kansas. CEO Chris Begley of McPherson was in with Hospira, Inc. to visit. Melynn Sight of Overland Park also stopped by to say hello.

Several Kansans came by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building. Perry and Barbara Rupp of Ness City and Spencer Rupp of Overland Park stopped by, as did Chad Chase and Michael Erlandson of Manhattan.

Very truly yours,

Jerry